

NOVEMBER 5, 1981

At calf shipping, we put off shaping our cattle for winter. I barely had time to market the lambs before the pro football season got underway. So I kept planning trying to make a cow work fit between the football games and the baseball playoffs until I messed around and waited so late that we have been cursed by having to move cows with baby calves.

Most of you probably know how hard it is to be rounding up in the early part of the calving season. These modern day cattle treat motherhood about as casually as barn sparrows respect private property lines. In the days when wild old sisters had to lick off the screwworm eggs from their babies in the summer and fight off over-eager cowboys that wanted to rope the same, a range cow was a model mother. But in this age of high powered dusts and fancy sprays, after the early morning nursing period it seems that the mother instinct has been overcome by a compulsion to chase pickups for feed.

Another thing that hurt us was the speed at which our quarry was hatching their young. According to the calendar, the cows were supposed to start calving in the middle of November. I don't know why they started so quick. Maybe some of the bulls got out early last year, or perhaps the abundant rains had shortened the gestation period. Everywhere we looked, they were shelling out full term calves like they'd been hit by a miraculous hormone.

The weather could have been the cause. I know a farmer down on the creek told me that one time he had a first calf heifer fall off in the river on her appointed day. He claimed that cow never gave a drop of milk from that day on until he sold her. He said a veterinarian thought the reason she'd dried up was because the cold river water had chilled her udder.

I guess it's pretty far fetched to blame the fall rains for making our cattle calve early. Other than the creek farmer and the Angelo cow doctor, nobody else out here knows anything about underwater deliveries. About half the hombres raised in the Shortgrass Country don't know enough about rain to carry an umbrella upright, much less diagnose a wet weather problem.

Anyway, we had a terrible time sorting the cows according to their ages with them leaving their babies hidden. It would've been a real wreck if one of the old hands hadn't noticed that every time I'd ride upwind from a herd, every one of the new mothers would break out and start hunting their calves.

Once he made that discovery, we really began to gathering cattle. You see, like I think I told you one time, Mertzon has more dogs per household than the Isle of Borneo ever had head hunters. The reason those cows were so nervous was that each morning before I was leaving town, I was getting just the right amount of dog smell from the dew on the grass to make those cows think there was a pack of hounds loose in the pasture.

From there on, the work was as easy as making a pitcher of mixed flavor KoolAid. Just as soon as I'd cast my spell, I'd ride on to another pasture to work the same magic. I tried retrieving them with an extra pair of boots soaked in cottonseed meal. But didn't work so well because this new process meal has so much oil squeezed out at the mill that it's too dry to stick to leather.

Go ahead if you want to and try our new invention. I'm not going to patent the

idea. The best dogs I've found to use for hosts are those big old saucers that never seem to leave the house. I am never going to have to hunt a baby calf again. Isn't it wonderful to live in such a scientific age and to share in the discoveries?